

AD-A208 862

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE		READ INSTRUCTIONS BEFORE COMPLETING FORM
1. REPORT NUMBER	2. GOVT ACCESSION NO.	3. RECIPIENT'S CATALOG NUMBER
4. TITLE (and Subtitle) No Shells, No Attack! The Use of Fire Support by 3 Commando Brigade Royal Marines During the 1982 Falkland Islands War		5. TYPE OF REPORT & PERIOD COVERED  Study Project
7. AUTHOR(s)  LTC Thomas R. Hogan		6. PERFORMING ORG. REPORT NUMBER
9. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME AND ADDRESS  U.S. Army War College Carlisle Barracks, PA 17013-5050		8. CONTRACT OR GRANT NUMBER(s)
11. CONTROLLING OFFICE NAME AND ADDRESS		10. PROGRAM ELEMENT, PROJECT, TASK AREA & WORK UNIT NUMBERS
		12. REPORT DATE 31 March 1989
		13. NUMBER OF PAGES 58
14. MONITORING AGENCY NAME & ADDRESS (if different from Controlling Office)		15. SECURITY CLASS. (of this report)  Unclassified
		15a. DECLASSIFICATION/DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE
16. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of this Report)  Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited.		
17. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of the abstract entered in Block 20, if different from Report)		
18. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES		
19. KEY WORDS (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number)		
20. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number)		

The 1982 British campaign to recapture the Falkland Islands was a naval operation of relatively short duration. Nevertheless, many of the British lessons learned are applicable to the U.S. Army. No notice deployment, assignment as part of a naval landing force, and combat operations beyond the range of land based close air support are all reasonable missions for light divisions. This study analyzes one aspect of the British experience--the use of fire support by 3 Commando Brigade Royal Marines. Through historical review, the study examines the use of mortars, artillery, naval gunfire, and close air support to complement ground maneuver. The purpose behind the study is to highlight the effectiveness with which 3 Commando Brigade utilized fire support during an island invasion, slightly more than one year before the U.S. Army experience in Grenada. Conclusions focus on three areas. In the first area, fire support relationships, the study contends that the British marriage of maneuver and fire support is exceptionally strong and that the strength is largely attributable to the utilization of the artillery battery commander at maneuver battalion headquarters. In the second area, fire support for naval operations, the importance of Army interoperability with naval gunfire and air support is developed. In the third area, fire support effects, the study asserts that the mental effects of fire support were a major contributor to British victory.

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NO SHELLS, NO ATTACK!

THE USE OF FIRE SUPPORT BY  
3 COMMANDO BRIGADE ROYAL MARINES  
DURING THE 1982 FALKLAND ISLANDS WAR

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

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U.S. Army War College  
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania 17013  
31 March 1989

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# ABSTRACT

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FORMAT: Military Studies Program Paper

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## NO SHELLS, NO ATTACK!

### THE USE OF FIRE SUPPORT BY 3 COMMANDO BRIGADE ROYAL MARINES DURING THE 1982 FALKLAND ISLANDS WAR

#### CHAPTER I

#### INTRODUCTION

There are many lessons to be learned from the 1982 British campaign to regain control of the Falkland Islands. Strategically, the issues of sovereign rights, maritime preparedness, and a focus beyond NATO's defense of Western Europe come to mind. Operationally, the British learned (or relearned) the importance of amphibious assault capability, air superiority, fire support, intelligence, and the role of modern precision-guided munitions. Tactically, even casual reading of the conflict is replete with accounts of personal sacrifice by individual sailors, soldiers, or marines during major engagements.

In my opinion, the U.S. Army has not paid adequate attention to the British experience, particularly in the area of fire support. When we discuss mid-to-high intensity conflict, fire support tends to be focused on increased range and armor defeating munitions. In low intensity conflict discussions, our emphasis on infiltration, stealth, and night operations sometimes excludes supporting fires in favor of surprise.

The Falkland Islands campaign offers an excellent opportunity to study the use of fire support under the exact conditions one might expect a U.S. ground force to encounter. No notice deployment, shore landing, and ground combat against a well equipped enemy are reasonable missions for the U.S. Army. Deploying as part of a naval task force, invading an island nation, and conducting operations beyond the range of support from a land based Air Force are highly probable ones.

The objective of this study is to present a historical review of the use of fire support by 3 Commando Brigade Royal Marines during the 1982 Falkland Islands War.

#### BACKGROUND

On 2 April in an act of unprovoked aggression which shocked the world, Argentina invaded the Falkland Islands. The small garrison of Royal Marines, assisted by a survey party from HMS Endurance then working on the Islands, put up stout resistance but the odds against them were overwhelming and after some four hours of fighting the Governor and Commander-in-Chief, Sir Rex Hunt, ordered them to surrender to prevent casualties.

The Falkland Islands are British sovereign territory and the inhabitants, the vast majority of whom are of British descent, enjoyed democratic institutions and wished to preserve their links with Britain. The Argentine invasion threatened to destroy their freedom and their way of life.(1)

This parochial view of the events leading up to the 1982 Falklands Campaign, printed for British Government Bookshops by Her Majesty's Stationery Office, ignores Argentine--British political disputes over Falkland ownership dating as far back as 1826. Also,



it ignores the traditional interpretation of the Campaign: Argentina's 1982 military excursion to the Falklands was a mistake and Great Britain's response was an overreaction. Nevertheless, this gift shop version of military action is important in its portrayal of London's attitude towards the whole affair--British honor had been challenged.

In response to the invasion, Britain's emergency cabinet immediately met to hear reports on her fleet's preparedness. The reports were not all good. Projecting and sustaining power some 8,000 miles away in the South Atlantic would present enormous problems.

Great Britain's warfighting strategy in 1982 was focused on NATO's defense against the Soviet Union. Accordingly, the Royal Navy was primarily structured for anti-submarine warfare in the North Atlantic.(2) She possessed only two small aircraft carriers. One, HMS Hermes, was scheduled for the scrapyard; the other, HMS Invincible, was being sold to the Australians.(3) Similarly, her only two amphibious assault ships, HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid, were threatened with sale to foreign powers.(4) Nevertheless, these ships, plus several modern destroyers and frigates, immediately prepared to sail.

The real issue was how to respond militarily. No contingency plans existed for the defense or recapture of the Falkland Islands group despite their proximity to Argentina and the on-going diplomatic struggle concerning ownership. Moreover, intelligence on

Argentine forces and their doctrine was virtually nonexistent. Britain did not anticipate fighting the Argentinians any more than she anticipated fighting for the Falklands.

Whatever the response, it had been a long time since Britain fought a war, and continued prestige as a military power would depend on her performance. Obviously, the operation would be a Royal Navy expedition, but the importance of a formidable landing force could not be understated. The Navy could lose the war, but only ground forces could win it in British tradition. The Union Jack had to be planted in the ground at Port Stanley.

3 Commando Brigade Royal Marines, the only thoroughly prepared force capable of immediate amphibious deployment, was at its normal seven days notice alert status. Its commander, Brigadier Julian Thompson, was awakened at 0315 hours by a telephone call from Major General Jeremy Moore, Commanding Commando Forces, Royal Marines:

You know those people down south: They're about to be invaded. Your Brigade is to come to seventy-two hours notice to move with effect from now.(5)

On 3 April, the full British cabinet met for statements and debate. Following outcries of shame to the nation and castigations of political/military failure from the floor, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher spoke. Mrs. Thatcher simply announced that, "A large task force will sail as soon as preparations are complete."(6)

## CHAPTER II

### THE LANDING FORCE

On 9 April, the force promised by Mrs. Thatcher sailed with more than 100 ships and over 28,000 men and women. The Task Force, under the command of Admiral Sir John Fieldhouse, included: the Carrier Battle Group (Rear Admiral J.F. Woodward), the Amphibious Task Group (Commodore M.C. Clapp), and the Landing Force Task Group, 3 Commando Brigade Royal Marines, (Brigadier Julian Thompson)

#### ORGANIZATION

Brigadier Thompson's 3 Commando Brigade had as its core infantry three numbered commandos of approximately eight hundred Marines each: 40 Commando, 42 Commando, and 45 Commando.(1) Also, the Brigade included 29 Commando Regiment Royal Artillery, 59 Independent Commando Squadron Royal Engineers, Special Boat Squadron Royal Marines, 3 Commando Brigade Air Royal Marines and numerous combat service support units.(2)

As the major part of the combined United Kingdom/Netherlands Landing Force contribution to the Amphibious Forces of the NATO Alliance, 3 Commando was well prepared for amphibious assault.(3) However, to create a balanced landing force and increased combat capability ashore, the Brigade was augmented by the attachment of 3rd Battalion, the Parachute Regiment (3 PARA) with its attached

supporting units. Thompson also received additional air defense and medical support based on intelligence estimates of the air threat. Meanwhile, 3 PARA's parent headquarters, 5 Infantry Brigade, was reconstituted by adding 2 Scots Guards and 1 Welsh Guards to its 2d Battalion, the Parachute Regiment (2 PARA), and alerted that they might also sail.

### FIRE SUPPORT

Fire support for the Landing Force consisted of mortars, artillery, naval gunfire, and close air support. Although British organization would include air defense in a discussion of fire support, its complexity in the Falklands Campaign warrants separate attention and will not be detailed in this study.

Mortar support for the numbered commandos was centralized in their Commando Support Company. Six 81mm mortars provided close indirect fire support through a variety of munitions. Although organic mortars have the advantage of dedicated responsiveness, their rapid rate of fire makes them costly in terms of ammunition supply to foot-mobile infantry. The Marines soon learned that the burden of carrying mortar ammunition is shared by every man carrying a pack.

Artillery support was provided by the 105mm Light Gun. Its range of up to 17,000 kilometers (firing super charge), six rounds per minute maximum rate of fire, and air transportability by Puma, Sea King, or Wessex helicopter, made it an ideal close support weapon.

3 Commando was supported by 24 light guns: 18 in 29 Commando Regiment Royal Artillery under command of Lieutenant-Colonel Mike Holroyd-Smith, and six in 29 Field Battery 4 Field Regiment Royal Artillery.

29 Commando Royal Artillery was ideally suited for the mission. Although an Army unit, all members were volunteers for the Regiment and passed the same commando course as their Marine counterparts. Years of joint training and deployments had built cooperation and confidence between the units. Moreover, repeated winter training in Norway provided them unique experience and equipment for arctic warfare.(4) As one Artillery Captain, who for the last five years spent January through March in Norway, commented:

Bad conditions force you to get your procedures absolutely right because you find that you have to devote more time to surviving than doing the job. Training under atrocious conditions means that you are less likely to be found lacking on the day when things may actually be easier."(5)

Naval Gunfire Support (NGS) was provided by several classes of destroyers and frigates hurriedly assembled to sail with the Amphibious Task Group. Older ships such as HMS Antrim and HMS Plymouth were equipped with twin 4.5 inch guns capable of ranges of 18,000 yards at a rate of more than one round every two seconds. The newer ships such as HMS Antelope and HMS Coventry, equipped with digital computers and fully automatic loading systems, were capable of ranges up to 24,000 yards and rates of fire of 24 shells per minute per barrel.(6) Although adequacy of ships and availability of naval gun ammunition was not a problem to the force, survivability from enemy air attack was.

Close Air Support (CAS) available to the Task Force was from the Harrier and its maritime variant, the Sea Harrier. Although the force sailed with 20 Harriers, their availability for ground support was extremely scarce due, once again, to the Royal Navy's NATO orientation. With the phasing out of larger carriers and decreased emphasis on launch and recovery of long range strike aircraft, the Harrier became the single aircraft of the British fleet.(7) Also, the fleet turned to smaller carriers such as the Hermes and Invincible. Even on those carriers the catapults and arrestor cables not required by the vertical take-off and landing capable Harrier had been removed. Had Hermes not been modified she could have carried the long range Buccaneer strike aircraft, thereby giving Britain the ability to destroy the Argentine air bases at any time. Instead, the counter-air battle had to be fought at sea, absorbing almost all of the available Harrier flight time.

Fire support assets available to the force were not particularly unique to a U.S. officer. Fire support coordination, however, does merit review, particularly in regard to the role of the Battery Commander and in the control of naval gunfire.

#### FIRE SUPPORT COORDINATION

By tradition, the senior Artilleryman assigned to a ground combat force wears two hats. He is both the commander of the artillery

organization and the principal artillery advisor to the supported maneuver commander. In higher level organizations, most nations expand the senior artilleryman's duties to include coordination of all fire support agencies, often causing him to seem more a member of the maneuver commander's staff than the commander of his own organization. When Brigadier Thompson writes of Lieutenant-Colonel Holroyd-Smith as "having been my gunner advisor for over a year," or, "His direct, frank manner and sound tactical knowledge had been a considerable asset on exercises and reconnaissances over the past year," he describes the exact relationship the American artillery community expects of battalion commanders placed in direct support of maneuver brigades.

The difference lies at the maneuver battalion (Commando in this case). Unlike the Americans who provide a fire support officer to maneuver battalion headquarters, the British send the artillery battery commander (BC). The battery's most experienced officer, a Major, is then placed in a position to know first hand the plans and situation surrounding his supported force and to make decisions quickly. The tendency to make command tours fairly stable and the perception that a commander "brings a unit with him" leads to strong combined arms team building at Commando level. Lieutenant-Colonel Nick Vaux of 42 Commando described the relationship:

42 Commando's Battery Commander was David Brown, a major in the Royal Artillery, who also brought with him two Forward Observation Officers and a strong communications team. A special light regiment of artillery forms part of Commando Forces Royal Marines, the volunteer Royal Artillery gunners

qualifying for the same green beret. David Brown, a neat, tactful and most professional officer, possessed the self-confidence and relaxed sense of humor that ensured our personal relationship was always easy. The observation officers, Captain Chris Romberg and Nick D'Apice, were both strong characters who could ski as fast and drink as hard as any of my own officers, with whom they maintained a competitive but easy-going relationship. This team spirit also extended amongst the marines and their gunner counterparts.(8)

Shore control of Naval Gunfire Support (NGS) is a second area in which British fire support coordination differs from the U.S. Unlike the American Navy's guns which are controlled by Naval spotter and control teams working on shore, the Royal Navy's NGS is controlled by ground force personnel. In the case of 3 Commando Brigade, Royal Artillerymen assume the mission.

Besides a headquarters and three light gun batteries, 29 Commando Regiment included 148 Forward Observation Battery designed specifically for controlling and spotting NGS. The battery was divided into a number of five man forward observation (FO) teams, each led by a Captain, Royal Artillery. Every member was qualified to call for and adjust naval gunfire and artillery; the Captain and the Bombardier (NCO assistant) were also trained in strike aircraft.(9) Extensive training permitted the teams to be inserted, usually several days ahead of the main force, by helicopter, small boat, submarine, or parachute in order to spot for ships firing in support of the main landings.

The investment in specialized training for these FO teams demanded returns in the form of job stability. For example, Captain



Hugh McManners and his Bombardier, Nick Allen, deployed having held the same positions on the same FO team for five years.(10) As is common with specialized units, however, their training often caused them to become alienated. McManners writes that FO team leaders actually have more contact with the Royal Air Force and Navy than the Army, often creating "a cosmopolitan attitude not always popular in the Army proper."(11)

With the sailing of the task force, Mrs Thatcher made good on her promise. But, with no warning, no contingency plans, and no ship loading plans for an operation of this magnitude, Julian Thompson had his hands full just getting his force and their equipment aboard ships. All this was accomplished and the last of the ships in the first wave sailed from the United Kingdom just seven days after the Argentines invaded Port Stanley. The Brigadier could now focus on the impending battle.

## CHAPTER III

### ASCENSION

Julian Thompson had plenty of time to prepare for battle. What he needed was information from which he could develop a plan. Moreover, the degree to which a landing force would be needed in the fight was in question.

Politically, there was the question of Argentina's willingness to fight the British. A large contingent claimed that the Argentinians would quickly realize the foolishness of their move and needed only some face-saving way to extract themselves. Militarily, the question was one of degree of force. Many believed that the presence of the British armada would be sufficient to cause Argentina to back down without a fight. If a fight did occur, others believed that air and naval power would suffice and the landing force would merely show British commitment through an extended ground presence.

The uncertainty surrounding the landing force was furthered by Admiral Fieldhouse's refusal to let the Amphibious Task Group proceed directly to the Falklands. Instead, Commodore Clapp was instructed to take his Group (including Thompson's Landing Force) to Ascension Island and wait until the sea and air battles had been fought.(1)

Holding at Ascension was probably a blessing for the Landing Force. When leaving England, the concept was simply to get moving as quickly as possible and develop plans enroute.(2) Unsure of exactly

what equipment would be required or what conditions would be encountered, units generally brought everything they had and whatever else they could borrow.(3) The stop at Ascension provided the opportunity to repack equipment, cross deck troops for the amphibious landing, and test fire selected weapons systems ashore. More importantly, it allowed time to develop plans.

While enroute to Ascension, 3 Commando Brigade's staff developed countless plans and counter plans aboard Fearless. The focal point for planning was Brigadier Thompson's Rover Group consisting of his primary staff plus all supporting arms commanders. The Rover Group had worked together for over a year and in Thompson's opinion, was totally "in the Brigade Commander's mind."(4) Planning began with brainstorming sessions where members presented options for unconstrained use of their units' capabilities based on expertise within their arm. The Brigade Commander would then select various options from which his staff was to produce realistic plans.(5)

As Brigadier Thompson's gunner, Lt.-Col. Holroyd-Smith was the advisor on all aspects of fire support: naval gunfire, artillery, fighter-ground attack, and air defense missiles. One of his greatest challenges in Rover Group meetings was to reorient the thinking of younger officers away from peacetime training artificialities and toward the combat lessons he had learned while fighting communist infiltrators in Oman. Captain Hugh McManners, a Naval Gunfire Observer (NGFO) from 148 Commando Observation Battery recalls one such occurrence:

There was much 'peacetime' sophistry concerning gunnery that had to be dispelled so that realistic plans could be made. Colonel Mike would lecture groups of offending staff officers, jabbing the air with his pipe; and would turn to me with a glint and a smile and say, out of the corner of his mouth, "These bloody staff officers. They don't have to first idea about artillery."(6)

While the Rover Group brainstormed, unit commanders conducted individual and small group training. Extensive physical fitness training toughened feet, legs, and backs for the rugged terrain of the Falklands. Training in individual combat skills such as weapon handling, field-craft, survival, and aircraft recognition also received priority.

Lt.-Col. Vaux considered two aspects of 42 Commando's enroute training to "later prove critical:" first-aid and supporting-fire control. His account of the latter reveals not only an understanding of the training but also an appreciation for the maneuver/fire support relationship.

The other subject on which, fortunately, we placed much emphasis was supporting-fire control. Normally, practical training in this is limited for anyone below the rank of sergeant, and even NCOs are lucky to get much first-hand experience. There are simply not enough artillery rounds or mortar bombs available, and priority is given to the specialist Forward Observation Officers and Mortar Fire Controllers who operate as part of Commando Headquarters or with the rifle company commanders. It was already obvious, however, that in the Falklands unit manoeuvre would be less likely than fighting patrols; the ability of a marine in a rifle section to call down supporting fire accurately could therefore be decisive. We were lucky in having our Royal Artillery fire-control teams with us on the ship; lucky, too, because, in the case of 42 Commando, the whole battery had just been with us in Norway for three months. Not only did they teach us technique, but they also transmitted comprehension of what guns and mortars could achieve. The seeds of essential confidence in fire support were sown while we were outward bound in [SS] Canberra.(7)

By the end of the second week in April the Amphibious Task Group had closed at Ascension. British historian Max Hastings describes the intensity of the planning effort he observed while accompanying 3 Commando Brigade:

The fruit of their joint labours on the passage to Ascension was a forty-six-page appreciation with eleven annexes, outlining the amphibious options for a landing in the South Atlantic. [Moreover], Thompson did not conceal his reluctance to risk his force in an immediate assault on the Falklands: "We were a one-shot operation, you see. It couldn't be like Dieppe, where if we tried and it didn't work, we could make sure we did it better next time. We had to get it right in one go." (8)

Sharing the Brigadier's concern that it had to be right the first time, Lt.-Col. Vaux took maximum advantage of the time at Ascension to nurture those seeds of fire support confidence he described planting while enroute. Live firing of small arms and crew served weapons was common across the Commandos while there. Vaux, however, expanded his live fire training to include 81mm mortar shoots laying down barrages of smoke, HE, and WP rounds against which he would maneuver his troops. Training without overly restrictive safety measures, his marines gained confidence in their mortars' control and developed a sense of operating within the concussion of indirect fire.

While training ashore increased the marines' confidence, the Brigade Staff's plans began to take better shape aboard Fearless. Having departed England with no aerial photographs and extremely limited intelligence, defining assault objectives and targeting enemy positions was almost impossible. (9) Now, with Thompson in daily

secure radio contact with Northwood, hard intelligence began to develop. Estimates put the enemy strength on the islands at over 10,000.(10) Enemy artillery was estimated at 1 1/2 Battalions (approximately 30 guns) of Italian made 105mm pack howitzers.(11) Although the pack howitzers could be outranged by the British Light Guns (17,000m vs 10,200m), their lighter weight and ability to be broken down into small loads made them much more mobile. Additionally, an unknown number of French 155mm Field Howitzers were believed to be in position to defend the Argentine garrison of Port Stanley.(12) Along with these estimates of ground strength came intelligence of an ever increasing air threat.

Detailed information on the geography of the Falkland Islands was also in great demand as Thompson's staff began to identify possible landing sites. Knowing from experience that the spongy peat-like soil would make wheeled vehicles useless, the marines left unit vehicles in England. Except for a few Volvo tracked vehicles normally used in the Norwegian snow (brought solely on the hunch that they might work), mobility would be by foot or helicopter.

The Amphibious Group only had sufficient helicopters and landing craft to assault with one battalion sized unit; two companies by sea and one by air.(13) Therefore, a 3:1 ratio of forces could only be achieved by assaulting a beach position defended by a company or less. Essentially, the challenge was to identify a site for an unopposed landing and then move inland to meet the enemy.

Based on updated intelligence, defeating the enemy would require more British troops than originally planned. Northwood agreed to send 2 PARA to join 3 Commando Brigade immediately and issued instructions that 5 Infantry Brigade was to prepare to sail. Northwood further concurred that Thompson's force should be capable of making the initial landing provided it was at a point where there would be no immediate ground resistance. Once 3 Commando was ashore, 5 Brigade (Brigadier Anthony Wilson) would join them in the beach-head. Major General Jeremy Moore would then assume command of all ground forces.(14) Meanwhile, Thompson was to remain at Ascension, concerning himself only with land operations, while the sea and air battles were being fought.

One particular land operation was very much on Julian Thompson's mind while held-up in the Mid-Atlantic. Eight hundred miles south-east of the Falklands, 42 Commando marines were fighting the first battle of the war at South Georgia.

## CHAPTER IV

### SOUTH GEORGIA

Although the majority of 3 Commando Brigade sailed from England on 9 April, Julian Thompson and his Brigade Staff sailed with Admiral Woodward's main body on 6 April. As if meeting the accelerated departure schedule was not enough to worry Thompson's staff, just prior to embarking they learned that an operation was being planned to recapture South Georgia. Independent from operations against the Falklands proper, the recapture of South Georgia would precede the main invasion and require a landing force from 3 Commando.(1)

South Georgia's significance lay in it being the spark which touched off the Falkland conflict. Argentine workers, accompanied by marines, landed on the island on 19 March to salvage scrap metal from an abandoned whaling station. Refusing to comply with customs regulations and raising the Argentine flag over the island, their presence prompted British protests and Argentine commitment of "full protection" to the landing party. Full protection became the 2 April landing of 2,000 to 5,000 Argentine troops near Port Stanley.(2)

Argentine troop strength in South Georgia was estimated at about 60 marines, most likely stationed either at Grytviken or at the whaling station in Leith protecting themselves from the severe terrain and weather of the island.(3) Beyond the range of land-based Argentine air cover, South Georgia seemed, to the planners in



Northwood, a likely objective for a company sized unit well trained and equipped for arctic warfare.

Brigadier Thompson disagreed. He strongly preferred to take his entire brigade to South Georgia, partially to guarantee seizure of the first objective, but more importantly, because the island could provide a rehearsal for his brigade and a base from which to conduct further operations against East and West Falkland.(4) Thompson lost. Shipping space restricted the force to no more than a reinforced company. 42 Commando, still not completely unpacked from a winter deployment to Norway, was assigned the mission.

The second-in-command of 42 Commando was Major Guy Sheridan. An experienced snow and ice mountaineer, Sheridan was designated as the landing force commander while Lt.-Col. Vaux picked his M Company as the marine force. On 7 April Sheridan's force flew to Ascension Island. Total force strength was approximately 200 men including M Company, two 81mm mortars, a section of the Commando Reconnaissance Troop, a small logistic and medical party, two Naval Gunfire Observation parties from 148 Battery, and one section from the Special Boat Squadron (SBS).(5) At Ascension, the force crossdecked to RFA Tidespring then sailed south as part of a Task Group which included HMS Antrim, HMS Brilliant, and HMS Plymouth as escorts. Before leaving England, it was suggested to Sheridan that in view of the virtual certainty of where the Argentines would be, he should contain the enemy by occupying dominating terrain in the vicinity of

both Grytviken and Leith, then use naval gunfire to persuade them to surrender.(6) Allocating two NGF parties suggests that Thompson and Vaux expected Sheridan to heed their advice. Further, the allocation underwrites an appreciation within 3 Commando of the utility of fire support to accomplish missions without sacrificing lives. In fact, that is exactly what happened.

The Task Group closed in the vicinity of South Georgia on 21 April. Attempting to insert their reconnaissance elements, the Group encountered numerous problems caused by severe weather, bad seas, and downed aircraft. On 25 April the sighting of an Argentine submarine caused the Group to disperse; the element of surprise had been lost. Although the sub was attacked by depth charges and machine gun fire, it managed to return to Grytviken Harbor. Sheridan pressed the Naval Task Group Commander for permission to attack, recognizing that the sub's crew would soon help reinforce the garrison. After a frustrating wait of several hours while the Navy staffs debriefed and discussed the attack on the submarine, approval was given for the landing.(7)

Despite the absence of the bulk of M Company (by then 200 miles away), Sheridan quickly assembled a force of about 70 men, roughly half of what the enemy's strength was then estimated to be. At 1445 hours, while Antrim and Plymouth started shore bombardments, Sheridan's force was inserted by Antrim's, Brilliant's, and Plymouth's anti-submarine helicopters.(8)

The details of the operation were best described by Lt.-Col. Vaux:

The key to this plan was Naval Gunfire Support. Directed by Captain Chris Brown, RA, from Endurance's Wasp helicopter, Antrim put down a spectacular creeping barrage towards the old whaling station at Grytiken. Brown placed shells all round King Edward Point without damaging the settlement, and finished with a flourish, dropping a salvo onto a small outcrop called Hobart Rocks, some 300 yards offshore. This so demoralized the enemy that, even before the British force--landing from helicopters while the bombardment was in progress--could close within small-arms' range, the Argentines had hung out several white sheets. As Guy Sheridan reached the top of the ridge that had screened the fly-in, he saw that the battle was effectively over. While Cedric and his men 'legged it' down the other side of the ridge, towards the settlement, the wily Sheridan summoned a helicopter to fly him forward for the surrender, urgently calling for the ships now to show themselves in Cumberland Bay. This combined appearance of land and sea forces eliminated any second thoughts the enemy might have had. At 1715 Cedric's sergeant-major was running the Union Jack up the whaling station's flagpole, while Sheridan accepted the surrender. South Georgia had been recaptured.(9)

The Marines had drawn first blood at South Georgia. The total human cost of the engagement was only one Argentine killed, yet the British had captured 180 prisoners. 3 Commando clearly understood the advantage of sending a bullet instead of a man.

Brigadier Thompson described the engagement, adding his concern for what lay ahead:

The recapture of South Georgia had been an almost bloodless victory. It proved, if it needed proving, the value of naval gunfire support. The two Naval Gunfire Forward Observation parties had earned their spurs and done splendidly. However, the easy victory created in some quarters a mood of dangerous over-optimism that the operation to recapture the Falklands would be a 'push-over', a mood not shared by 3 Commando Brigade.(10)

## CHAPTER V

### PREPARATION FOR LANDING

While London rejoiced over the recapture of South Georgia, the Amphibious Task Group continued to agonize over the main landing on the Falklands. Adding to the frustration, Admiral Woodward was becoming increasingly impatient. In a message 3 Commando received from the flagship Hermes, Woodward demanded: "There are 4,700 square miles of the Falklands and only 10,000 Argentinians, which works out at two per square mile. What's your problem?"(1) The problem continued to be intelligence. Although Northwood agreed the landings must occur in areas of least possible resistance, intelligence reports provided Thompson with estimates of enemy strength without reference to dispositions. An SBS element, accompanied by the two NGFO teams who had played a major part in the recapture of South Georgia, was inserted onto East Falkland Island on 29 April to fill the intelligence void. Three sites were reconnoitered for the landing.

Cow Bay and Berkley Sound were logical choices due to their proximity to Port Stanley. However, they appeared to be fairly well defended with their approach harbors likely to be mined. San Carlos Bay, 50 miles from Port Stanley on the opposite coast of East Falkland, proved more promising. The SBS reported that although it was visited occasionally by patrols, the shoreline was void of any evidence of mines. Through several days of observation, no

minelaying activity was observed in the Bay. With the exception of an Argentine outpost on Fanning Head which would have to be 'taken out' before H-Hour, San Carlos was undefended.(2)

Reports of a suitable landing site could not have come at a better time. On 4 May the British destroyer HMS Sheffield was sunk after being hit by an Exocet missile. Later the same day a Sea Harrier was shot down and, on 6 May, fog claimed two more Harriers. The hope of winning the air and sea battles before inserting ground troops was rapidly fading. On 8 May the war cabinet issued the order for the landing force to sail from Ascension.(3)

Once underway, the Rover Group quickly finalized plans for the Amphibious landing. On 10 May Thompson assembled all commanders and briefed them aboard Fearless. Plans would continue to be made for a landing sometime after 19 May. However, the final decision to land was in the hands of the War Cabinet.

To retain the element of surprise, 3 Commando would conduct a night landing on multiple beaches around Port San Carlos. Naval gunfire would silence the Argentine force on Fanning Head in conjunction with a program of sporadic shore bombardments, thereby not signaling the landing. The two parachute battalions (2 PARA having by now joined the force), 40 Commando, and 45 Commando would initially go ashore while 42 Commando remained in reserve aboard Canberra. Thompson's plan was to secure the high ground overlooking San Carlos by first light. Then, as quickly as possible, one light gun battery would be flown in followed by the Rapier air-defense

battery and the remaining light guns.(4) Northwood directed the landing force to exploit out of the beachhead only as far as was safe, sound, and sensible, while they awaited the arrival of 5 Infantry Brigade, scheduled to sail from Southampton on 12 May.(5)

Although enemy resistance was expected to be light, the South Georgia experience had clearly proved the worth of naval gunfire in defeating Argentine ground forces. FO team leaders from 148 Battery became increasingly active as the force sailed south. At sea they cross decked by helicopter repeatedly finding discrepancies in radio frequencies and codes. While one team leader was aboard Antelope he discovered there were no ground maps of the Falklands on board. The crew anticipated firing NGS from nautical charts.(6) Additionally, live fire gunnery drills were conducted to increase accuracy and test coordination. While ships' guns fired at smoke flares dropped in the ocean by helicopters, pilots and spotters practised low level flying and pop-up adjustment procedures.

FO teams ashore with the SBS were also active as the amphibious force moved toward the Falklands. From 1-20 May they adjusted 13 naval bombardments of Argentine positions, including a 50 minute shelling of Port Stanley airfield on 9 May. On 14 May they fired in support of an SAS raid on Pebble Island airfield in which 11 enemy aircraft were destroyed.(7)

The British fleet was in assault formation on 18 May. Final insertion of the landing site securing teams had been made days before, all of them accompanied by FO teams to spot naval gunfire.

Additionally, helicopter overflights by NGFOs equipped with thermal imaging night vision goggles had targeted Argentine outposts and security elements in the vicinity of the landing sites.(8) On 19 May the British war cabinet gave the go ahead for a 21 May landing at San Carlos.

On the evening of 20 May everything was set for the invasion. Soon after midnight diversionary attacks were mounted by Harrier jets and naval gunfire against Stanley airfield, Goose Green airfield, Darwin, Fox Bay, and Fanning Head. Julian Thompson describes his troops as they lowered themselves into landing craft during the predawn hours of 21 May as:

...a long snake of sweaty, heavily laden, softly cursing men scrambling down ladders and narrow passageways, tripping over obstructions and bumping into each other in dim red light or total blackness. The slowly moving files of marines with blackened faces snaked seemingly endlessly into the craft. From the upper decks the flashes of 4.5 inch shells could be seen bursting among ribbons of tracer on Fanning Head where Captain McManners, Royal Artillery, was spotting for HMS Antrim.(9)

Thompson understood men and appreciated fire support--both would get him ashore and both would get him to Stanley.

CHAPTER VI  
SAN CARLOS TO GOOSE GREEN

The landing at San Carlos went almost exactly as planned. As the amphibious force neared the beaches, FO teams ashore called in NGS on the Argentine observation post at Fanning Head. While Antrim shelled the enemy position, SAS and SBS teams closed in and opened fire with machine guns and what they described as "the superb new American 60mm lightweight mortar.(1) Meanwhile, FO teams working with D Squadron 22 SAS adjusted shells from HMS Ardent onto Darwin to keep the Argentine reserve pinned down and provide a diversion from the main landing.(2)

The Commandos moved inland with obvious appreciation for the integration of maneuver and fire support. For instance, Vaux described 42 Commando as moving in tactical advance with "companies leap-frogging forward in mutual support...the mortars maneuvering in sections so they could respond instantaneously to hostile fire."(3) Similarly, Lt.-Col. Hunt of 40 Commando moved ashore with his NGFO next to him and Plymouth standing by to fire targets of opportunity as they advanced. The fire support was so plentiful and the resistance so limited that as 2 PARA landed, their NGFO was waiting for the Battalion on its objective.(4)

The first priority after securing the beach-head was getting the guns ashore. By the time the first battery, 79 Commando, completed the move, Brigadier Thompson and his staff had an appreciation for



what would haunt them until the Argentinians surrendered--the helicopter assets required to move guns and artillery ammunition. The eight Wessex helicopters allocated to move 79 Commando Battery ashore required a total of 85 sorties to complete the move.(5) Future moves would have to incorporate the larger Sea King helicopters and ideally, the Chinooks that were enroute aboard the cargo ship Atlantic Conveyor.

Soon after first light the British became engaged by Argentine ground attack aircraft. However, it soon became apparent that the targets of these continuing attacks were the ships and not the troops on shore. While the sailors and Harrier pilots fought the battle, the Landing Force moved inland. Meanwhile, Thompson ensured that he did not extend himself beyond his helicopter-dependent support. His description of restraining 42 Commando leaves no doubt that it was a matter of command interest.

I met the CO, Lieutenant-Colonel Vaux, as the Commando was moving east through Port San Carlos and told him to pursue the enemy, who had just been seen retreating eastwards, but not to advance further than Cerro Montevideo, eight kilometers east of Port San Carlos, and thus stay within range of friendly artillery.(6)

For the next few days 3 Commando held their position complying with what Thompson understood to be the intent of Admiral Moore's directive to "secure a bridgehead on East Falkland, into which reinforcements can be landed."(7) However, anxious to continue the momentum gained during the landing, Thompson ordered 2 PARA to

conduct a large scale raid on the Argentine positions at Darwin and Goose Green.

According to the plan, one company of 2 PARA was to march on the afternoon of 24 May and secure Camilla Creek House. Once Camilla Creek was secured, three 105 light guns with 200 rounds of ammunition per gun would be flown in under the cover of darkness. The next night the remainder of the Battalion would move through Camilla Creek, pick up the forward company, and then conduct the raid supported by the guns and naval gunfire. Three guns with ammunition was the estimate of what could be moved at night without signaling the enemy, although a full artillery battery was preferred.(8)

On the afternoon of the 24th, D Company 2 PARA moved out to secure Camilla Creek House. Soon afterwards, Thompson was forced to make a difficult decision:

The first helicopter task that night, however, was to fly reconnaissance elements of D Squadron 22 SAS to Mount Kent overlooking key ground around Stanley. No sooner was this completed than the weather over the whole of East Falkland closed in and the visibility became so bad that the next helicopter sorties, to fly the guns to support 2 PARA to Camilla Creek, became impossible. The raid was not a starter without artillery so, to Jones' intense annoyance, I cancelled it."(9)

Max Hastings was with Lt.-Col. Jones when he halted D Company and recounts more vividly the paratrooper's annoyance: "I've waited twenty years for this,' said H savagely, 'and now some f\_\_\_ing marine's cancelled it."(10)

Regardless of how his subordinates felt, Julian Thompson was not attacking without fire support. Furthermore, fire support would get lift priority as seen from his further discussion of the cancelled raid: "On anticipated arrival of new helicopters, the Brigade would be some way towards getting the mobility it needed to lift not only the men, but more important the guns and ammunition to start investing Stanley."(11)

The next day, Thompson's plans for airlifting his force toward Stanley were sunk in the South Atlantic. The cargo ship Atlantic Conveyor was hit by an Exocet missile and went down with 12 Wessex and 3 Chinook helicopters on her decks. Artillery would now consume practically all available helicopter assets; the troops would have to walk.

Adding to Thompson's problems, he was getting increased pressure from Northwood to get moving. London was anxious for reports of ground action. On 26 May he called an urgent commander's group meeting and explained that he had been unsuccessful in convincing Northwood that his Brigade should make one decisive push towards Stanley. 3 Commando Brigade had been ordered by General Trant to move on Goose Green, despite Thompson's insistence of its strategic irrelevance.(12) 2 PARA received the assignment. This time, however, the mission was to capture (rather than raid) the Argentine garrisons at Darwin and Goose Green.

When 2 PARA's mission changed from raid to attack, additional helicopters became available. Still, only three guns were sent to

Camilla Creek to support the attack. Based on intelligence of increased enemy strength, however, each howitzer would have 320 rounds of ammunition shuttled forward. Similar to artillery's domination of helicopter lift, the Battalion's 81mm mortars consumed scarce Volvo BVs. Only two mortar tubes were transported by the tracked vehicles and ammunition was distributed among all walking men. For naval gunfire support, the frigate HMS Arrow was available, but only during the hours of darkness. Remaining in San Carlos Bay after dawn was becoming too costly. Beginning at first light on the 28th, Harrier strikes were also to be available.(13)

As darkness fell on the night of 26 May, three light guns from 8 Battery, 29 Commando Regiment were shuttled forward, and by morning on 29 May, Londoners were boasting about the successful recapture of Goose Green. Although more costly in terms of British lives than the landings at San Carlos, Goose Green provided assurance of British capability. Moreover, Goose Green has given military analysts endless opportunity for examination.

Goose Green can be a study in leadership, focusing on the individual courage of the Battalion Commander, 'H' Jones, killed by machine gun fire while personally leading an assault against an enemy strongpoint in an attempt to get a stalled company moving. It can be a study in unit dynamics, focusing on the factors that allowed a battalion of 450 paratroopers discovering, while on the battlefield, that they were outnumbered by four to one to persist in the attack. Or, Goose Green can be a study of the combination of maneuver and fire support. This study addresses the latter.

During the early hours of 28 May, HMS Arrow demonstrated a risk associated with naval gunfire support. At 0314 hours, she stopped firing in the middle of a battle because of a turret malfunction. Individual howitzers and mortars can be called out of action, but stoppages in auto-loading ships' guns normally cause the whole ship to cease firing. To the credit of Arrow's crew, the gun was repaired and the ship stayed on station long after her scheduled 0430 departure providing fire for the battle to secure Darwin Hill.(14)

At 0520 hours when Arrow departed for the relative safety of open water, Harriers were scheduled to join the fight. However, early morning fog and mist (common to the South Atlantic in the spring) kept the Harriers on the deck of the aircraft carriers until late on the afternoon of 28 May. Fire support plans for naval close air support must be made with particular consideration of weather conditions.

Mortars provided the next lesson. They often run out of ammunition quickly. Some attribute this situation to mortars' closeness to the fight causing adrenaline filled infantrymen to fire them at their maximum rate. Others attribute rapid ammunition consumption to the tendency of soldiers to lighten the load they are carrying. Remember that mortar ammunition was carried by almost everyone in 3 Commando. Whatever the reason, the battalion mortars were out of ammunition before 0900 the first morning. When Lt.-Col. Jones was killed trying to get his stalled attack going, he had no support from his mortars.

Artillery was the only fire support still available when 2 PARA finally attacked Darwin. In fact, when A Company closed with the enemy defenses, it was by advancing within 100 meters behind the fire of the 8 Battery's Light Guns.(15)

By 1100 hours Darwin was secured and 2 PARA, now commanded by Major Chris Keeble, moved on. However, the battalion became stopped outside Goose Green by enemy artillery, mortar, and direct fire. Thompson's admiration for the Major Keeble's situation can be seen in his description of the predicament:

Keeble could see the anti-aircraft guns on the Goose Green peninsula firing at him and his men on the ridge line, keeping them all pinned down. There seemed no end to this battle and no answer to this fire, coming well out of range of anything he could fire back, except his artillery, which was almost out of ammunition.(16)

Hastings, still accompanying 2 PARA adds, "Then he heard the naval gunfire support officer say, 'We've got the Harriers!'"

At 1525 hours three Harriers had made it off the carrier deck and moved toward Keeble's force. Unfortunately, the Forward Air Controller (FAC) with the Battalion had injured his ankle on the approach march and was no longer with the unit. On the other hand, Captain Arnold, the NGFO, had kept the FAC's radio team in tow. Training of 148 Battery's FO Team Leaders and Bombardiers now paid off as Arnold planned, coordinated, and controlled a close air strike. With D Company pinned down on the airfield, Arnold brought the first two Harriers in from the northwest, over the paratroopers' heads, and destroyed or silenced the air-defense guns with cluster

bomb units. Simultaneously, he directed the third Harrier in from the northeast, silencing not only air-defense guns but also an Argentine artillery unit.(17)

That night 2 PARA had Goose Green surrounded while Keeble developed a plan which Thompson describes as one "...to offer the Argentines the chance to surrender or be destroyed by artillery and air support."(18) An ultimatum detailing the terms of surrender was prepared in Spanish and sent into the settlement with two Argentine prisoners. To ensure he had sufficient firepower to carry out his threat, Keeble then sent this request to Thompson: Three more 105mm light guns, 2000 rounds of 105mm ammunition, the six 81mm mortars the Battalion had left behind, mortar ammunition, and the Cymbeline mortar-locating radar.(19) Keeble obviously believed in fire support.

When Thompson approved Keeble's plan he authorized the destruction of Goose Green, if necessary.(20) As helicopters brought forward the remaining guns of 8 Battery and ammunition resupply, a tasking signal was sent to the Carrier Battle Group asking for Harrier support. The Harriers would be used for two strikes. The first, a demonstration, would be clear of but close enough to the settlement to convince the Argentines that the British meant business. If the Garrison did not surrender, Captain Arnold would call the next strike directly on them.(21)

At first light on the 29th, the Argentines sent a messenger stating that they agreed to a meeting and at 1000 hours, Air

Commodore Pedroza surrendered the Goose Green Garrison and 1,200 prisoners of war. Julian Thompson deliberately stayed away from Goose Green that morning so that Keeble could receive the surrender.

Before leaving a discussion of Goose Green two points need to be made. First, the Argentines had now surrendered twice, both times precipitated by the threat of destruction by fire support. Second, Goose Green was the second land engagement of the war won by a British Major. Normally the second-in-command of their units, these officers thoroughly understood and used fire support in defeating his enemy. The second point is even more significant when one considers that the two Majors, Sheridan, a Marine Commando and Keeble, an Army paratrooper are from two very different type units.



## CHAPTER VII

### APPROACH TO STANLEY

Unsure about when Major-General Moore would arrive with 5 Brigade, Thompson was reluctant to again experience the urging forward he had received from Northwood while at San Carlos. Therefore, while 2 PARA was engaged in capturing Darwin and Goose Green the rest of 3 Commando was moving toward the final objective, Port Stanley. Thompson planned to move his main force eastward along the northern portion of the island and halt short of Stanley to wait for 2 PARA. Once 2 PARA had secured Goose Green, they would move eastward along a southern route. By the time the two forces converged, Thompson would better know the status of Moore's arrival and plans for the final assault of Stanley would be made.

Two points deserve mention in regards to the move east. First, both axis of movements were designed to ensure coverage by fire support. With helicopter assets being scarce, leapfrogging artillery to cover the moves would be too costly. Instead, naval gunfire would cover coastal routes of march while artillery was moved forward to support attacks on specific objectives. Second, Brigadier Thompson was quick to apply the lessons of the fight at Goose Green. 2 PARA had learned that the Argentine Army could be forced to surrender, but only after being hit very hard.

Thompson now considered it essential that every attacking battalion should be supported by guns and that each gun should have

about 500 rounds of ammunition.(1) He was wrong in letting Jones go against Darwin with only three 105mm guns and two 81mm mortars. That mistake would not be made again. Precluding it, however, would demand tremendous aviation support. Thompson obviously became very involved in moving his guns. He writes:

To lift one light gun battery and 500 rounds per gun, enough for one battle, takes eighty-five Sea King helicopters, or eight Sea King helicopters flying almost eleven times each, or any permutation thereof--and there were four light gun batteries. It is a fact of military life that the deeper you advance into enemy territory, your needs expand accordingly; more and more has to be transported further and further.(2)

Despite harsh conditions, the trek across East Falkland went well. On 29 May, 3 PARA secured Teal Inlet on the north shore and 45 Commando walked unopposed into Douglas settlement discovering that the enemy had departed the day prior. On 30 May, Major-General Moore entered the San Carlos Bay with 5 Brigade. Thompson, however, had already ensured 3 Commando Brigade would continue the initiative. He had ordered the capture of Mount Kent, the first of several objectives which dominated the approaches to Port Stanley.

On the evening of 28 May, 42 Commando received a radio message from 3 Commando Brigade ordering them to seize Mount Kent the following night. Available airlift for the mission consisted of four Sea King helicopters and the sole Chinook on the Falklands, which had been flying when the inbound Atlantic Conveyor was sunk. An SAS team (accompanied by a NGFO Party) would secure a landing site in the area. Guidance from Brigade also indicated the aircraft package

would be available for several nights to complete the move and that "at least a section [2] of light guns with designated ammunition must be included in the lift forward." (3)

That night, Lt.-Col. Vaux and his staff developed the package that would fly forward on the 29th. Because of the distance between San Carlos (where 42 remained securing the landing site) and Mount Kent, Vaux insisted that his tactical headquarters (Tac Hq) accompany the force consisting of K and L Companies. However, K Company would have to leave thirty men behind to make room for a Blowpipe air-defense section and a section [2] of 81mm mortars which in Vaux's words would "complement the guns. Their trajectory and rate of fire would increase our ability to break up the enemy counter-attacks that seemed inevitable." (4)

The following morning the plan had to be modified. When a Sea King and the Chinook flew to 42's headquarters for the coordination brief, Vaux discovered that his aircraft allocation had been cut by Commodore Clapp who still retained control of all helicopters in the operational area. Vaux was to get 4 Sea Kings for only two sorties each and no Chinook that night. (5)

Eventually, adjustments to the plan were made. L Company and the guns were cut; K Company, TAC Hq, and four (vice the original two) 81mm mortars would go. However, halfway through the mountains that night the Sea Kings were enveloped in 'white out' conditions of blinding snow and were forced to return to San Carlos.

The next morning Vaux was reassured that he would receive unconstrained use of four Sea Kings and one Chinook for a second attempt that night. The Sea Kings would go in with K Company (-), Tac Hq., and the mortars. Once the landing zone was confirmed secure, Vaux would call for the vital Chinook which would begin shuttling guns forward while the Sea Kings shuttled the rest of K Company followed by L Company.

The initial Sea King lift went in drawing some ground fire which was silenced. With the LZ secure, the Chinook brought in one light gun but encountered difficulty when returning for the next load. A snowstorm temporarily blinded the pilot who smashed into the mirror-like surface of a lake and miraculously bounced off. The damaged Chinook successfully crashlanded back at San Carlos but could not continue the mission.

Lieutenant-Colonel Nick Vaux then made a significant decision: L Company would stay back; only one more troop lift would go forward carrying the rest of K Company, Tac Hq, and air-defense; thereafter, all helicopters would be dedicated to lifting guns and artillery ammunition.(6) With an isolated company facing a likely Argentine counterattack, Vaux traded a second rifle company for more artillery.(7)

Mount Kent was secured and at first light on the 31st Vaux stood on the summit overlooking Port Stanley. Nearby, K Company Commander, Captain Peter Babbington and his artillery observer, Captain Chris Romberg were discussing the possibility of shelling Muddy Brook, the

former marine garrison on the outskirts of Port Stanley. The shelling would require use of super charge propellant which extends the maximum range of the gun but rapidly wears out tubes. The Battery Commander, Major Brown, evaluated the tube wear aspect while Vaux considered the implications of showing his hand with such little force to back it up. Vaux best describes the discussion that took place as they were joined by Colonel Mike Rose from 22 SAS, historian Max Hastings, and a young marine:

A few artillery rounds would demoralize the occupiers of Stanley, said Rose. Cheer up the British inhabitants, declared Peter. Make history, urged Max. Kill some bloody 'spics', growled Corporal Adams. David Brown radioed his agreement from the landing-site. Chris Romberg predicted that he could spot on to the target. There seemed to be no point in consulting anybody else who wasn't there with us, so the gunner party commenced with that radio jargon which reaches back through the haze of battles to the days of limbers and mounted gun teams: "One, this is Three-One. Fire Mission Battery. Fire Mission Battery--over ...". The guns went into action.

As he had promised, Romberg straddled the road outside Moody Brook with his second salvo. It was a most satisfying sight as the conical puffs of smoke blossomed in the air, long before the distant 'crump' of the explosions reached our ears. Everyone in Stanley must have heard them loud and clear.(8)

## CHAPTER VIII

### STANLEY

7 (Sphinx) Commando Battery's rounds into Port Stanley did more than cause consternation among its Argentine defenders. The shelling motivated the entire British land force to move as quickly as possible towards the port city. Major-General Moore and his division staff struggled to plan and coordinate the final attack on Stanley before the Argentine defenses could be further strengthened. Yet, with 5 Infantry Brigade now on the ground, helicopter and logistic support were even more at a premium.

Not until 3 June were sufficient aircraft allocated to 3 Commando to lift a second light gun battery, 79 Commando, forward to Mount Estancia to provide relief for 3 PARA and 42 Commando, being continuously shelled by Argentine 155's near Stanley. The scarcity of artillery ammunition limited firing to 100 rounds per battery per day. Counterbattery and harassing fires were tightly controlled and many targets of opportunity were not fired in favor of building stocks of ammunition for the final attack. The frustrations caused by this lack of support was apparent in a message Thompson sent to General Moore's headquarters on 4 June:

1. Understand we only have one Sea King and one Wessex under opcon tomorrow.
2. This allocation totally inadequate for current resupply tasks eg. 2,000 rounds 105 ammo.
3. No shells, no attack! (1)

Moore got the message. Ammunition was arriving by sea into Teal Inlet and during the next few days, hundreds of Sea King sorties shuttled it and other supplies forward while units were positioned for the final push.

The Battle for Port Stanley began On 11 June. According to the plan, 3 Commando Brigade was to attack Mount Langdon, Two Sisters, and Mount Harriet. Once this line was secured, 5 Infantry would pass through 3 Commando to attack Tumbledown Mountain and Mount William. Having moved through an ever tightening band of dominating terrain, the British would eventually occupy all the high ground around Port Stanley. The Argentines, with their backs to the water, would then be forced to fight or surrender.

Thompson's attack on the night of 11/12 June was successful despite considerable losses. Not only were the Argentinians fighting harder as the circle around them tightened, but the further east the British went, they found themselves fighting more disciplined Argentine units. With 2 PARA in reserve, the Brigade fought with the momentum and confidence that comes only from experience in battle. Across the Brigade, units fought combined arms battles. Thompson describes 3 PARA's night attack on Mount Langdon as 'gutter fighting', conducted often at close quarters with grenade, rifle and bayonet, and 66mm LAW, with support from guns.(2) During the ten hour battle, artillery fires frequently fixed engaged enemy while stalled paratroopers withdrew and regrouped. Conversely, company advances often took the form of crawling behind artillery fire while naval gunfire blocked enemy escapes.

42 Commando's attack on Mount Harriet was much the same as seen from Thompson's account of K Company's operation:

The handling of the Company by [Captain] Babbington, at night, in the confusion of battle was a masterpiece. The officers, NCOs, and marines worked like a well-drilled football team as they fought their way forward to the crash of 66mm LAWs, 84mm MAWS, the crump and flame of their own artillery and mortar fire and that of the enemy.(3)

Vaux described his version of the action:

On the Gunner net the urgent, precise voice of Chris Romberg could be heard constantly designating new targets for our guns. Their fire was being brought down with unerring accuracy almost onto the assaulting groups of marines. Afterwards, none of us doubted the decisive role our gunners had played in this battle. Over 1,000 shells or bombs would fall on "Zoya" alone that night, all of them instantly, precisely laid to cover movement, suppress defensive fire, break up resistance. They gave us an overwhelming advantage, only too evident from the shattered enemy strong-points, the twitching, cowed prisoners so terrified of their own incoming artillery.(4)

Mount Harriet was secured by first light on the 12th and 42 Commando prepared for an Argentine counterattack. Again, Vaux offered an interesting perspective:

The main enemy threat came obviously from the direction of Mount Tumbledown. 'J' Company, at that end, must therefore have priority in supporting fire arrangements. Luckily Mike Norman was another specialist in this field, and he now put his knowledge to real advantage by utilizing the captured weaponry as well as our own. Once it was light enough the Argentine heavy machine-guns were re-sited. When shortly afterwards, a group of enemy stragglers appeared on the track below Tumbledown, these guns were given a most successful 'user trial' by a gleeful Sergeant Shiel. An equally unexpected advantage was the captured concentration of four 120-mm mortars, with a stockpile of several hundred HE bombs. These heavy and cumbersome tubes have a range of more than 6,000 yards, and so could be brought to bear on to all the likely enemy approaches. The alert sentries had already pinpointed a mass of Argentine troops inside some quarries about two



miles down the track. We decided to disperse these before they could get up to any mischief. Mike Norman cheerily invited me to fire the ranging shots. I found this extremely exhilarating, because the huge bomb's time of flight was so extended; having pulled the firing lever, one could dash up onto the crest in time to observe its impact. After a few near misses the nerves of the irresolute enemy gave out and they retreated in disarray towards Stanley. All of which provided a cheering diversion for the chilled, wearied, but still smiling marines of 'J' Company Commando HQ.(5)

45 Commando's attack on Two Sisters reveals not only the same effective integration of maneuver and fire support, but also the degree to which the availability of fire support influenced decisions. Thompson describes a discussion he had with Lt.-Col. Whitehead of 45 Commando:

At 4:30 am on 12 June Whitehead reported that the Commando was secure on all its objectives and speaking to me on the radio, told me that he was making preparations to exploit forward on to Mount Tumbledown as instructed. To Whitehead's annoyance, I ordered him to go firm on Two Sisters and not assault Tumbledown. There were several reasons for making this decision. By the time 45 Commando had reorganized for the next attack daylight would be only two or so hours off and it would take the remaining hours of darkness to cover the 5000 meters from Two Sisters to Tumbledown via Goat Ridge, the best route. Daylight would find the Commando starting its attack over open ground against a well-prepared position where the heavy machine guns would inflict many casualties. In any case 42 Commando had not yet secured Goat Ridge, a prerequisite to 45 Commando moving on to Tumbledown. Finally, the 105 gun batteries were running low on ammunition and no naval gunfire support would be available in daylight. Indeed, HMS Glamorgan, who had bravely remained later than ordered to support 45 Commando, had paid the penalty for overstaying the time--she was hit by a land-based Exocet missile when she cut across the Exocet danger area in a bid to get away to the east before daylight. An attempt at Tumbledown in daylight and without proper support, was not on in my opinion.(6)

3 Commando secured the Mount Langdon, Two sisters, Mount Harriet chain by the morning on the 12th. The next night, 5 Infantry Brigade attacked to secure Tumbledown Mountain and Sapper Hill while 2 PARA, still under control of 3 Commando Brigade, seized Wireless Ridge. Action on all objectives was much the same as described on the night of the 11th, with even increased volumes of fire as the British neared Stanley. Naval gunfire was used extensively to silence Argentine artillery positions while artillery fire was surgically placed on specific targets in the village of Port Stanley. During the last hours of the fighting, 6000 rounds of artillery ammunition were fired at the Argentine positions.(7)

By dawn on 14 June, all units reported their objectives secure and some indicated that they were moving into Stanley. Major-General Moore then ordered both brigades to halt in place, anticipating an Argentine surrender. White flags appeared from the buildings of Stanley by mid-morning and at 1300 hours, the Argentines sent word that General Menendez "would talk." Major General Moore flew into Stanley soon after dark and, at 2100 hours, accepted the surrender of all Argentine forces on the islands.

As Moore was signing the surrender, Brigadier Thompson was with one of his forward units in a "requisitioned" house on the outskirts of Stanley. His recollection of that night provides an interesting view of how he intended to respond to any sudden change of heart by the enemy:

So with luck all of the young men now alive in my Brigade would go home alive, the soldiers of B Company 2 PARA lying asleep in heaps all over the house we shared, so that every square inch of space was covered in bodies, still clutching rifle or machine gun, only sentries alert; ...45 Commando shivering with cold on Sapper Hill; 42 Commando among the rats and debris of the sea-plane hanger; 40 Commando about to go to West Falkland; 2 PARA and 3 PARA in deserted houses, sheds, and the racecourse grandstand in the west end of town; and... the gunners of 29 Commando Regiment Royal Artillery, asleep beside their now silent guns, only the gun sentries awake, one at each gun, ready to fire the loaded pieces on the targets on which they were laid.(8)

## CHAPTER IX

### CONCLUSIONS

The Falkland Islands War was unanticipated and employed a relatively small ground force. Therefore, the conflict offers an excellent study for U.S. light forces. My conclusions after a historical review of 3 Commando Brigade's use of fire support during this conflict focus on three topics: fire support relationships, fire support for naval operations, and fire support effects.

#### FIRE SUPPORT RELATIONSHIPS

The mechanism to provide fire support coordination to 3 Commando Brigade is much the same as the direct support relationship between field artillery battalions and maneuver brigades in the U.S. Army. Both nations enjoy the benefit of integrated operations. Further, joint deployments and shared training in both systems build mutual confidence and camaraderie. The real question is whether or not the British have something worth considering in their utilization of the artillery battery commander at the maneuver battalion headquarters. The answer is yes. U.S. direct support artillerymen will always tell you they have a good relationship with their supported maneuver commander; the reverse is not true.

Examination of fire support relationships in 3 Commando Brigade yields nothing but laudatory comments toward their "gunners". Praise

comes from Royal Marine infantrymen and journalists who accompanied the force and not from the Commando's artillerymen. Pick up a book of the U.S. experiences in Vietnam or Grenada and see if you find the same.

I am convinced that a significant factor in this positive relationship is the presence of a mature, field grade artillery officer at maneuver battalion level. Further, I am convinced that when this officer is the commander of the supporting artillery battery, the relationship is strengthened through increased responsiveness.

#### FIRE SUPPORT FOR NAVAL OPERATIONS

The British campaign to recapture the Falkland Islands is considered a naval operation. Use of the term naval, however, does not mandate that the landing force be exclusively (or even predominantly) comprised of naval forces. The parachute battalions attached to 3 Commando Brigade from the beginning and the infantry brigade joining the fight in progress were all part of the landing force. The landing force is simply the force which is assigned the mission of securing amphibious operational objectives. In this case, the objective was Port Stanley. The lesson for U.S. Army light forces is that when assigned to the landing force for a naval operation, external fire support may come exclusively from the Navy.

The planning for and use of naval gunfire is a must. Naval gunfire is fast, all-weather, and extremely effective. Moreover, it can be fired with extreme accuracy as 148 Battery observers repeatedly demonstrated. Discounting naval gunfire based on 20 year old Vietnam war stories is a cop-out and a mistake.

The tendency toward overreliance on the U.S. Air Force's land based aircraft to provide close air support is also a mistake. Army units operating as part of naval task forces can expect to get most, if not all, of their close air support from the naval aviation. Peacetime training must ensure Army familiarity with the tactics and procedures of both the Air Force and The Navy.

#### FIRE SUPPORT EFFECTS

Brigadier Thompson understood the importance of fire support to light forces. The one time he allowed a unit to attack with less than adequate fire, the attack stalled. More noteworthy, Thompson reached the point where the availability of fire support drove operational planning. He delayed his final attack on the approaches to Port Stanley, for example, until 12,000 shells were flown forward. Then, during the final battle, his batteries fired the equivalent of a regiment's training allocation for four years.(1) Beyond understanding the physical effects of fire support, Thompson had an acute appreciation for the emotional effects it would have on his enemy.

When describing fear of enemy weapons, Richard Holmes contends such fear is irrational and is aroused because a particular weapon is felt to be especially frightening. Holmes asserts that, "central to the question of fear of a weapon is the soldier's perception of his ability to do something about it. Aimed rifle fire may be a direct personal threat, but is a threat directed by another individual. Artillery or booby traps are different." (2) Brigadier Thompson repeatedly used this fear to intimidate the Argentines.

Readers of this study might make the error of attributing the surrenders of South Georgia, Goose Green, and Port Stanley to inferior Argentine soldiers rather than superior British use of fire support to complement maneuver. One last quote is offered to prevent this mistake. A victorious NCO from 3 PARA said: "A sniper's just another man, and your training tells you what to do. But what do you do about some fucker four miles away?" (3)

## NOTES

### CHAPTER I

1. Her Majesty's Stationery Office, The Falklands Campaign--A Short History, p. 1.
2. Max Hastings and Simon Jenkins, The Battle for the Falklands, p. 83.
3. Ibid., p. 11.
4. Ibid., p. 87.
5. Julian Thompson, No Picnic: 3 Commando Brigade in the South Atlantic: 1982, p. 1.
6. Hastings and Jenkins, p. 78.

### CHAPTER II

1. Edgar O'Ballance, "The Falklands, 1982," in Assault from the Sea: Essays on the History of Amphibious Warfare, ed. by Merrill L. Bartlett, p. 429.
2. Thompson, p. 187.
3. Ibid., p.3.
4. Hastings and Jenkins, p. 86.
5. Captain Hugh McManners, Falklands Commando, p. 25.
6. Ibid., p. 24.
7. Brian Perrett, Weapons of the Falklands Conflict, p. 76.
8. Nick Vaux, Take That Hill, p. 72.
9. McManners, p. 23.
10. Ibid., p. 29.
11. Ibid., p. 11.



### CHAPTER III

1. Hastings and Jenkins, pp. 94, 114.
2. Thompson, p. 10.
3. McManners, p. 28.
4. Thompson, p. 25.
5. McManners, p. 53.
6. Ibid., p. 52.
7. Vaux, pp. 28-29.
8. Hastings and Jenkins, p. 21.
9. Thompson, p. 19.
10. Hastings, p. 179.
11. Thompson, p. 36
12. Perrett, p. 105.
13. McManners, p. 71.
14. Hastings and Jenkins, p. 179.

### CHAPTER IV

1. Thompson, p. 27.
2. Kenneth G. Weis, The War for the Falklands: A Chronology,  
p. 1.
3. Thompson, p. 27.
4. Hastings and Jenkins, p. 21.
5. Thompson, p. 28.
6. Ibid., p. 29.
7. Vaux, p. 47.
8. Thompson, p. 30.

9. Vaux, pp. 47-48.
10. Thompson, p. 30.

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1. Hastings and Jenkins, p. 182.
2. Thompson, p. 35.
3. Hastings and Jenkins, p. 342.
4. Thompson, p. 40.
5. Hastings and Jenkins, p. 185.
6. McManners, p. 62.
7. Thompson, p.35; Weis, p. 16.
8. McManners, p. 103.
9. Thompson, pp. 56-57.

#### CHAPTER VI

1. Hastings and Jenkins, p. 196.
2. Thompson, p. 57.
3. Vaux, p. 88.
4. Thompson, p. 59.
5. Vaux, p. 96.
6. Thompson, p. 66.
7. Ibid., p. 73
8. Ibid., p. 77.
9. Ibid.
10. Hastings and Jenkins, p. 237.
11. Thompson, p. 78.

12. Hastings and Jenkins, p. 237.
13. Ibid., p. 238
14. Thompson, p. 87.
15. Ibid., p. 88.
16. Ibid., p. 92.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid., p. 94.
19. Hastings and Jenkins, p. 249.
20. Ibid.
21. Thompson, p. 94.

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1. Hastings and Jenkins, p. 262.
2. Thompson, p. 68.
3. Vaux, p. 101.
4. Ibid., p. 102.
5. Ibid., p. 104.
6. Ibid., p. 109
7. Thompson, p. 108.
8. Vaux, p. 120.

#### CHAPTER VIII

1. Thompson, p. 115.
2. Ibid., p. 146.
3. Ibid., p. 163.

4. Vaux, p. 177.
5. Ibid., pp. 187-188.
6. Thompson, p. 158.
7. Hastings and Jenkins, p. 305.
8. Thompson, p. 186.

#### CHAPTER IX

1. Richard Holmes, Acts of War: The Behavior of Men in Battle, p. 171.
2. Ibid., p. 210.
3. Ibid., p. 211.

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